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Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6725th meeting

Tuesday, 28 February 2012, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Menan	(Togo)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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12-24356 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: Let me start today with the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria. The Syrian Government has manifestly failed to carry out its responsibility to protect its people. On the contrary, it has subjected residents in several cities to indiscriminate bombardment by tank and rocket fire, killing its own people in ways reminiscent of the Hama massacre perpetrated by the Syrian Government in 1982. Unfortunately, the international community has also failed in its duty to stop the carnage. Actions and inaction to date have seemed to encourage the regime in its belief that it has impunity to carry on the wanton destruction of its own civilians.

The disproportionate use of force and military aggression against the civilian population by the authorities has driven the largely peaceful opposition forces to resort to armed resistance, although to date the opposition's firepower appears to be minimal as compared to the heavy weapons being used by the Syrian army. Extremists have also used the situation to carry out terrorist activities, in particular in Damascus and Aleppo. While we cannot give exact casualty figures, there are credible reports that the death toll now often exceeds 100 civilians per day, including many women and children. The total number of people killed so far is certainly well more than 7,500.

The displacement of civilians within and outside Syria has continued. Approximately 25,000 refugees are now registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in neighbouring countries. Between 100,000 and 200,000 people are internally displaced. The humanitarian consequences of the violence have become severe. In towns affected by sustained fighting, such as Homs, Hama and Dar'a, water and electricity have been cut off. Access to medical care and basic food and fuel are critically needed.

On 26 February, Government security forces launched a merciless bombardment of residential areas in Homs. We are now into the fourth week of the terrible attacks on major neighbourhoods in that city. The situation for the people trapped inside those neighbourhoods is increasingly dire. According to human rights organizations, more than 5,000 civilians have been prevented from fleeing by Government forces. On 21 February, American reporter Marie Colvin and French photographer Remi Ochlik were among the victims in Homs. As the Secretary-General has said, their deaths further shed light on the horrors being inflicted on the Syrian people each day.

On 12 February, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent were able to make a delivery of some basic humanitarian assistance to Homs. On 24 February, some injured women and children were evacuated by the ICRC from the Bab Amr neighbourhood. The ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent also successfully completed a delivery of food and other assistance for 12,000 people in the city of Hama yesterday.

Unfortunately, the ICRC's repeated calls for a daily humanitarian pause to allow for the delivery of emergency aid have not yet been implemented. The United Nations fully supports the ICRC effort, which would allow the injured to leave and seek medical attention and for urgent supplies to be distributed. The Secretary-General has asked Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos to travel to Syria to negotiate humanitarian access and assess humanitarian needs. She is in the region and stands ready to go to Damascus as soon as she is allowed entry into the country.

The international commission of inquiry for Syria, in a report (A/HRC/19/69) issued on 22 February, concluded that the Syrian Government forces have committed widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity, with the apparent knowledge and consent of the highest levels of the State. I commend the report to each of the members of the Council. It does not make for easy reading, but its implications for

our responsibilities is clear. The Human Rights Council held a debate on this issue today in Geneva.

The League of Arab States has adopted a series of important decisions calling on the Syrian authorities to end the killing. On 31 January, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the President of the League's ministerial committee sought the Security Council's support for their efforts to end the violence and seek a political solution. On 16 February, the General Assembly adopted a ground-breaking resolution (resolution 66/253) in support of the Arab League's efforts. As members of the Council well know, the resolution includes a request for the Secretary-General and all relevant United Nations bodies to provide good offices, including through the appointment of a special envoy, in support of the Arab League's efforts.

Following intensive consultations, the Secretary-General and the Arab League Secretary-General announced on 23 February the appointment of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan as their Joint Special Envoy for Syria. He will work to end the violence and human rights violations and promote a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. Mr. Annan will arrive in New York tomorrow to begin talks with the Secretary-General. I hope he will have the opportunity to meet with members of the Council to hear their suggestions on how to bring this terrible situation to an end.

On 24 February, the Tunisian Government hosted a meeting of the friends of the Syrian people. The conference brought together representatives of more than 65 nations and organizations. It demonstrated wide international support for the Syrian people and called on the Syrian Government to halt attacks on civilians and allow immediate access for vital relief goods and services. The message to the Syrian authorities should be clear — the bleeding of Syria must cease. The conference condemned the Syrian Government's excessive use of force and demanded the withdrawal of heavy military equipment from urban areas to allow a peaceful transition of power.

In his message to the conference, the Secretary-General stressed the need for a political solution and highlighted the responsibility of each member of the international community to help stop the violence. The Secretary-General again calls on the Government of Syria to stop the wanton killing of its own people. It must fulfil its duty to protect them instead. Its failure to do so leaves the international community no option but to act.

I would like to turn briefly now to the peaceful transfer of power in Yemen. Special Adviser Jamal Benomar will brief the Council in detail after he returns, but I do want to note that the agreement signed in Riyadh on 23 November 2011 provided for a detailed road map for a political transition based on a power-sharing arrangement between the then ruling party and a coalition of opposition parties. This could not have been achieved without the members of the Security Council speaking with one voice and Mr. Benomar's close cooperation on the ground with the Gulf Cooperation Council and other actors.

The implementation of this agreement is on track. Presidential elections with a consensus candidate were held on 21 February. On 25 February, former Vice-President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi was sworn in as the new President of Yemen. The Secretary-General called the new President to congratulate him. The next step is the holding of the national dialogue conference, followed by a constitution-making process. This will lead to general elections in two years. Yemen's transition remains delicate and will require ongoing facilitation. Special Adviser Benomar will remain closely engaged with all sides.

Please allow me now to turn to the Middle East peace process. On 8 February, the Secretary-General briefed the Council on his trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and his efforts to encourage the parties to sustain the talks that started on 3 January in Amman. Unfortunately, these talks have stalled. Since the last meeting of the negotiators on 25 January, President Abbas has been consulting internally and with the Arab League. So far, prospects for the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations remain dim.

During the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-Up Committee meeting on 12 February and the meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Committee on 20 February, the Palestinians reiterated their position that direct talks should not resume unless all settlement activity was halted. Israel committed to a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines and the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to insist that Israel wants to continue the talks, but without preconditions.

We believe that the framework set by the Quartet in its statement of 23 September 2011, with the aim of reaching an agreement before the end of the year, remains relevant. Quartet envoys regularly assess developments and remain engaged with the parties. I hope that the parties will use the coming period to refocus on the need to exchange proposals on territory and security. In this regard, the Secretary-General fully supports the efforts initiated by King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein of Jordan. There must be improvements on the ground to complement these efforts.

In another notable development, President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Mashal agreed on 5 February to form a transitional Government of technocrats with Abbas as Prime Minister. President Abbas has emphasized that this Government would adhere to his political programme and to all previous PLO commitments. However, opposition to the agreement within Hamas in Gaza has so far prevented concrete results. A date for elections has not been set, and voter registration in Gaza has yet to be allowed by the de facto authorities.

As the Secretary-General has repeatedly affirmed, the United Nations supports Palestinian unity within the framework of the PLO commitments, the Quartet principles, and the Arab Peace Initiative. Reconciliation on this basis and Israeli-Palestinian peace talks need not be mutually exclusive in any way.

The situation on the ground in both Gaza and the West Bank remains dangerous and ultimately unsustainable. Further settlement expansion was authorized in several locations in the West Bank, including in two outposts and in the settlement of Shiloh deep inside the occupied Palestinian territory. Such steps move us further away from the goal of a two-State solution and are in violation of Israel's Road Map obligations. In addition, on 13 February, the Jerusalem municipality granted permission for a new archeological visitors' centre in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and Israeli police demolished a structure that had served as a Palestinian community centre.

Incidents of settler violence against Palestinians and their property, as well as violence by Palestinians against settlers, continued in the West Bank. Demolitions of Palestinian property resulted in 138 people, more than half of them children, being left homeless in East Jerusalem and Area C. We called for a halt in those demolitions and for a fair planning and zoning system to meet Palestinian needs for growth.

On 10 February, Palestinian security forces, for the first time in 15 years, enforced law and order in the H2 area of Hebron, which is under full Israeli control. At the same time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted 463 operations in the West Bank. Overall, 251 Palestinians, including 11 children, were injured in the West Bank by the IDF, and 358 were arrested. Twelve IDF soldiers were injured by Palestinians.

The reporting period also witnessed increased tensions and violence between Palestinians and Israeli security forces around holy sites. Clashes erupted in the compound of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif between Israeli police and Palestinians on 19 and 24 February. Renewed clashes erupted on 25 February as thousands of Palestinians participated in the funeral in Al-Ram of a Palestinian resident who had died the previous day after being shot by an IDF soldier. That series of violent incidents resulted in a number of Palestinians, as well as one Israeli police officer, being injured.

On 24 February, Palestinians also threw stones towards Rachel's Tomb, a site of Jewish worship in the West Bank. On 20 February, for the third time this month graffiti was sprayed on a church in Jerusalem, including a reference to settler involvement. I call on all parties to safeguard the peace and sanctity of religious sites. We also remind both parties that hate speech from anyone is unacceptable.

On 21 February, following an arrangement with the Israeli authorities for his release, Palestinian administrative detainee and Islamic Jihad affiliate Khader Adnan ended his hunger strike of 66 days. The holding of another 300 Palestinians under administrative detention remains a matter of concern. We believe that the use of administrative detentions must be exceptional. Those detained must be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees or released without delay.

Sixty-one rockets and one mortar shell that were fired this month from Gaza landed in Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. This is significantly more than what we reported last month, underscoring the continued risk of escalation. The IDF conducted one incursion and 28 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in one Palestinian civilian being killed and 20 injured. We reiterate our condemnation of indiscriminate rocket

attacks out of Gaza against Israel. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint. All should fully observe their obligations regarding the protection of civilians.

On 11 February, Egyptian security forces operating in the Sinai peninsula announced the seizure of a number of anti-aircraft missiles, as well as explosives, which were being readied for transfer to the Gaza Strip. We welcome those steps and call on others to intensive their efforts to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms into Gaza, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

On 21 and 23 February, IDF soldiers identified and removed explosive devices on the Israeli-Egyptian border. On 28 February, the IDF returned fire from suspected smugglers attempting to infiltrate Israel from Egypt, killing one of them. We have repeatedly said that the weapons transfers into Gaza must stop.

Gaza witnessed a severe shortage of electrical power around 14 February, which had serious consequences for health, education, water and sanitation facilities, highlighting that current socio-economic arrangements in the Gaza Strip are not sustainable.

The closure regime must be lifted within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009). In that context, discussions continue with Israel towards the liberalization of the entry of construction materials and the facilitation of exports. Following the Secretary-General's visit, we are awaiting approvals for urgent United Nations projects, including three key housing projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

In another development, on 13 February an Israeli diplomatic vehicle was attacked in India, injuring one person, while a similar attack was foiled in Georgia and another attempt was discovered in Thailand. The Secretary-General has condemned such attacks.

As the Secretary-General has noted, what is important now is for the parties to engage seriously on substance. We are concerned that the talks are stalled. We still hope that both leaders will realize that they must overcome the political impasse and rebuild confidence and momentum, using the framework suggested by the Quartet aiming for a negotiated solution by the end of the year. Time is not on the side of either party.

Finally, I would like to turn to Lebanon. On 23 February, the Secretary-General renewed the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon for three years from 1 March. Earlier this month, the Trial Chamber of the Special Tribunal ruled that the four people accused in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri would be tried in absentia.

The Syrian crisis remains a cause of tension in Lebanon. On 10 February, fighting broke out between Alawite and Sunni communities in the northern town of Tripoli, against the backdrop of demonstrations related to the situation in Syria, resulting in three people being killed and more than 20 injured, including members of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Order was restored the following day after the intervention of the army and local parliamentarians.

The situation along Lebanon's borders with Syria also remains of concern. The United Nations continues to monitor the influx of Syrian refugees into northern Lebanon. We continue to coordinate closely with the Government on the provision of assistance to the 6,900 refugees registered so far, as well as on matters of protection and the determination of their status.

The overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally calm. UNIFIL observed continuing air violations by the Israel Defense Forces, albeit at somewhat reduced levels.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.